

## **TITLE**

Data Practices in Australian Early Childhood Programs for Children With Additional Needs

### ***What you need to know (background):***

Several research and government reports highlight the important role of early childhood educators (ECEs) in maximising the inclusion and development of children with disabilities and additional learning needs in early childhood settings. To this end, ongoing data collection is needed to determine if practices are effective and to allow modifications where appropriate. Therefore, the aim of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of Australian early childhood teachers' perspectives about data collection and data use for children with additional needs.

### ***What is this research about?***

Researchers sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What type of data do early childhood educators collect in Australia?
2. Are there any differences in the types of data collected for typically developing children and children with additional needs?
3. For children with additional needs, how often and why are the data collected?
4. Are early childhood educators confident in their ability to collect data for children with additional needs?
5. What barriers to data collection are reported by early childhood educators?

### ***What did the researchers do?***

Researchers recruited 105 ECEs who were involved in developing educational plans in Australian early childhood education and care (ECEC) centres that supported children from birth to 6 years. All ECEs except for one had a qualification in early childhood, and only four respondents (3.8%) reported that they had a qualification in special education. Approximately a quarter of participants had a qualification below bachelor level, and about half of the sample was from NSW.

Participants responded to an anonymous, online 24-item questionnaire. In addition to background questions, items included questions about data practice including type of data (i.e., data written or permanently recorded) collected for children with and without additional needs. Multiple-choice questions comprised (a) data types collected for children with and without additional needs, and (b) frequency, purpose, usefulness, and confidence in collecting each data type for children with additional

needs. A 5-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) was used to rate statements related to perceptions of data collection and data use, and an open-ended question was used to solicit comments related to the challenges of data collection and data use.

The researchers then conducted a series of statistical procedures (descriptive and correlational) to answer the postulated research questions.

### ***What did the researchers find?***

#### **Supporting children with additional needs**

- The majority (78.1%) of the respondents had children with additional needs in their group at the time they were completing the survey.
- The majority of the respondents (83.8%) indicated that they had attended a professional learning course about supporting children with additional needs.

#### **Type of data collected**

- Most respondents collected anecdotal written records such as journals, photos, and work samples for both children with and without additional needs. The number of responses for which 'other' was nominated was almost 4 times more for children with additional needs than for those without.
- For children with additional needs, examples of 'other' responses included information from families, communication books, medical or specialist reports, individual family service plans, IEPs and reported progress towards the IEP goals, and a developmental screening questionnaire.
- There were no significant differences in the types of data collected between children with and without additional needs.
- While teachers use more frequently counted and timed behaviours and checklist data for children with additional needs, approximately one-third of teachers do not collect these data.

#### **Frequency of data collected**

- Photos and anecdotal written records were the most frequent data type collected, followed by children's work samples.

#### **Use and usefulness of data**

- Progress monitoring was the most frequently reported purpose for data collection across data types followed by program/activity planning. Early childhood educators typically use anecdotal data and photo data for program/activity planning for children with additional needs as well as for daily reporting to parents.
- More than three quarters of anecdotal and counted or timed data collectors perceived that the data they collect are useful for instructional decision-making and program modification for children with additional needs, with some variation in the level of perceived usefulness across data types.
- Practitioners were generally confident in using the data that they collect.

### ***How can you use this research?***

This study raises the importance of practitioners reflecting on their own use of data to determine the extent to which their practices are effective in improving children's outcomes.

Given the nature and extent of data reported to be collected by ECEs, children with additional needs may require more regular, frequent, and closer monitoring through the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data in order to determine developmental progress and to ensure data-informed program modifications.

This study also highlights the need for organisational and expert support for ECEC educators and practitioners in data collection and utilisation for children with additional needs.

Study findings provide impetus for the consideration of how data is shared across settings and people, thus promoting the effective inclusion of children with additional needs in ECEC settings.

### ***Where to from here:***

- Resources
  - DEC Recommended practices: *Assessment*. Retrieved from <https://www.dec-spced.org/dec-recommended-practices>
  - Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center- Practice Improvement Tools: *Performance checklists*. Retrieved from <https://ectacenter.org/decrp/type-checklists.asp>
  - [EBIP | Evidence-Based Instructional Practices \(vkcsites.org\)](http://vkcsites.org)
  - [Evidence-Based Practice \(EBP\) \(asha.org\)](http://asha.org)
  - [Roadmap #7 - Data Decision-Making and Program-Wide Implementation of the Pyramid Model - National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations \(challengingbehavior.org\)](http://challengingbehavior.org)
  -
- Links to related topics
  - [Unpacking the planning cycle: Part 1- We hear you \(acecqua.gov.au\)](http://acecqua.gov.au)
  - [02 Child Engagement.2022.pdf \(insped.org.au\)](http://insped.org.au)
  - [McCollow, M.M., & Hoffman, H.H. \(2020\). Evidence-based decision-making: A team effort toward achieving goals. \*Young Exceptional Children\*, 23\(1\), 15-23](#)

### ***About the researchers:***

Yuriko Kishida is an Honorary Senior Research Fellow at Macquarie University; Research and Evaluation Manager at Telethon Speech & Hearing; Honorary

Research Associate, Telethon Kids Institute, Honorary Affiliate, Institute of Special Educators, and Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, Curtin School of Allied Health

Mark Carter is Dean of the Academy for the Science of Instruction at MultiLit and an Honorary Associate Professor in the School of Education, Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Wollongong.

Coral Kemp is an Honorary senior lecturer at Macquarie University and Chair of the Institute of Special Educators

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